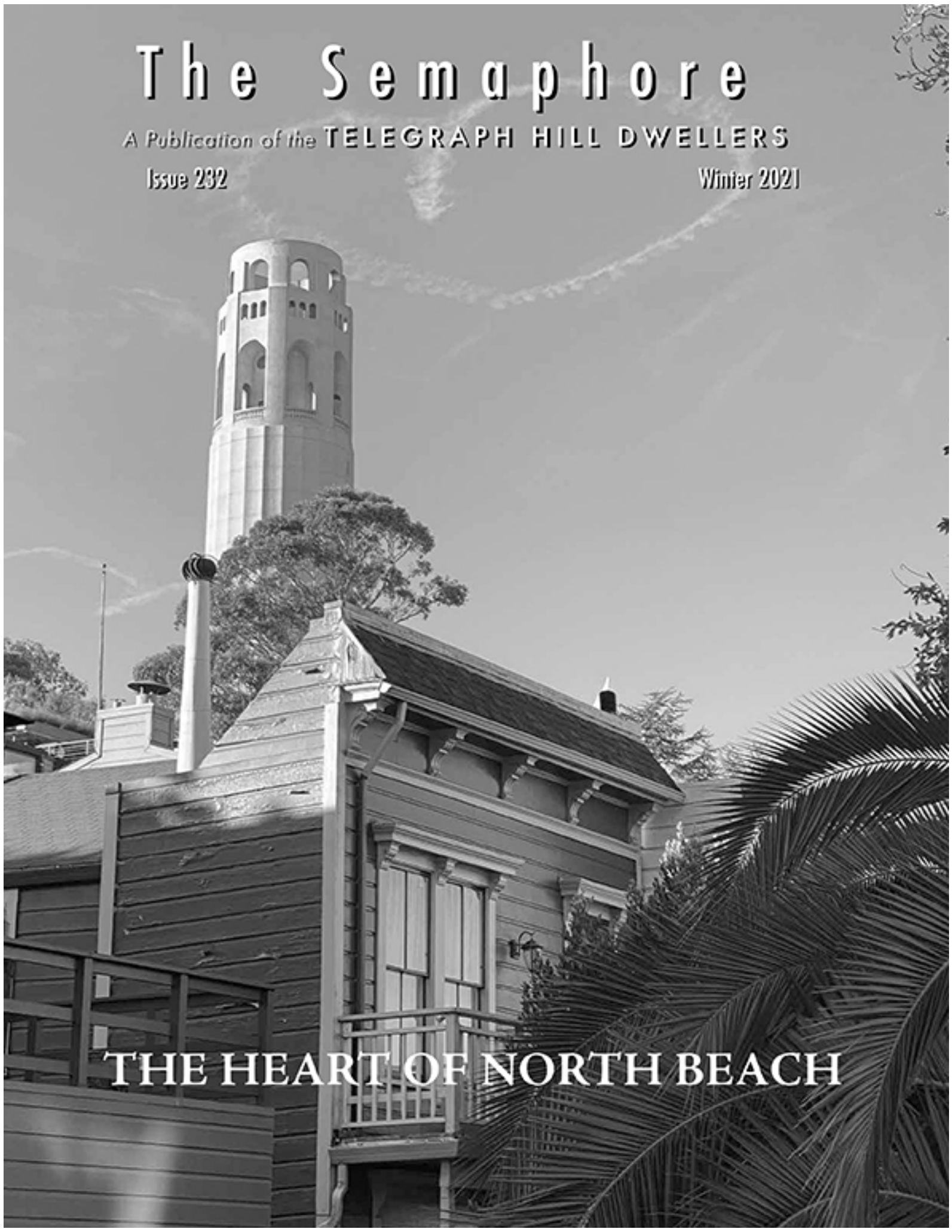
The Semaphore

A Publication of the TELEGRAPH HILL DWELLERS

Issue 232 Winter 2021



THE HEART OF NORTH BEACH

KIDS CORNER

by Sarah Kliban
kids@thd.org

Hear what five more neighborhood kids have to say, in this, our third column!

Ryan Ong – 7

If you could travel to anyplace in the world, where would you go?

I think to the North Pole and the Arctic. I'd go for about a month. At the Arctic, there's polar bears and whales, and at the North Pole, there's Santa's workshop. It's very cold there, and I like snow. I would snowboard.

If you could start a new restaurant in the neighborhood, what would it be?

A Jack in the Box. The special would be a cheeseburger with fries and a drink.

What's your favorite place in the neighborhood?

The corner store. The one that has orange and green. It has ice cream, cereal, gelato, and everything. They're nice, but I don't know their names.

Gianna Móragon – 11

If you could travel to anyplace in the world, where would you go?

I would go to New Zealand. I see it in movies, and it's really pretty. The weather looks really nice. I would go on hikes and go see where all the movies get filmed. I'd go for a couple weeks. Maybe I'll go when I'm older…when I'm 25.

If you could start a new restaurant in the neighborhood, what would it be?

I'd start a café. It would have breakfast foods and lunch foods. We'd be open all day. It would have light blue walls with art on them. Local artists. I'd call it 'Gianna's Café.'

What's your favorite place in the neighborhood?

Joe DiMaggio Playground, Coit Tower, and Aquatic Park.

Sammy Hu – 9

If you could travel to anyplace in the world, where would you go?

I would go to Taiwan because I kind of like that place. I've been there before, and I really like it. The first thing I would do is go eat authentic chicken Hot Pot, then go to the tallest building.

If you could start a new restaurant in the neighborhood, what would it be?

Maybe a Korean food restaurant because I don't see a lot here. They have great different types of meats, seaweed soup, pickles. I would call it 'Eat Korean Food Here.'

What's your favorite place in the neighborhood?

Washington Square Park. There's a lot of open space and I can play with my friends there. My school is close by, and the church is right there. There's a cool Italian restaurant close by and a cool gelato place on Columbus that's really good.

Levi Gemmill – 8

If you could travel to anyplace in the world, where would you go?

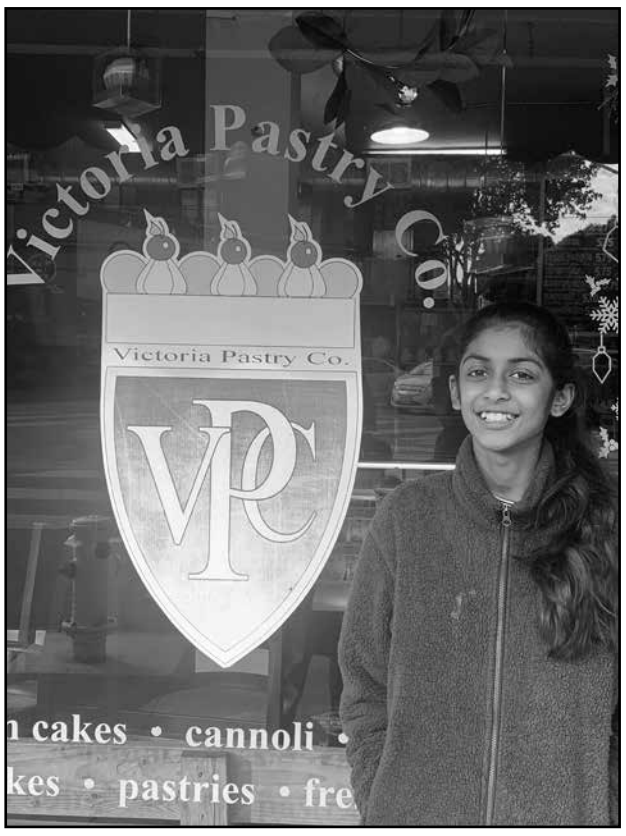
Hawaii. For two weeks. Maui. It's nice there…a lotta beaches. I love beaches. I'd go to the beach, maybe a water park, and sleep.

If you could start a new restaurant in the neighborhood, what would it be?

Italian. We would serve Chicken Parmesan. Maybe we could call it 'Ristorante Levino.'

What's your favorite place in this neighborhood?

Joe DiMaggio Playground. I can play with my friends there. There's a big space to play tag with them and stuff.



Aanya Shah – 12

If you could travel to anyplace in the world, where would you go?

It would be Spain because I love it so much there. I would travel to Madrid and do a road trip to some beaches–the Mediterranean Sea–and eat lots of tapas!!!

If you could start a new restaurant in the neighborhood, what would it be?

We don't need any more Italian food, now that I think about it. I like baking, and I would open a bakery that sells everything from breads to cookies to cakes–whatever you need. It would be the local bakery. The specialty would be a strawberry shortcake. It would be called 'North Beach Incredible Bakery.'

What's your favorite place in this neighborhood?

Jeffrey's Natural Pet Foods. I don't have a pet, but I really want one. Their window decorations are so beautiful, and there are so many adorable, cute, fluffy dogs coming in and out.

KIDS COVER ART CONTEST

The Kids Cover Art Contest deadline has been extended to March 15, 2021, with the winning submission to be featured on the cover of the Spring 2021 *Semaphore*. The issue will also include a photo and interview with the artist. If you have already submitted your cover art, don't worry—We have it! We thank you for your patience. For those of you who have not yet submitted an entry, look at the last issue (Fall 2020) for contest rules and information. We look forward to seeing everyone's art.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

by Stan Hayes
President@THD.org

You can almost hear it. Everywhere. Au revoir. Auf wiedersehen. Ciao. Adios. Joigin. Sayonara. Slan. Yasou. Namaste. Goodbye. A great and heartfelt global goodbye to 2020. Even though some of these goodbyes are more polite than anyone feels, their meaning is clear. So long. Don't let the door hit you on the way out.

This was a year like none other. At least the sun didn't explode as a supernova, though. And, no locusts here at least. Knock wood. 2020. For eyesight, perfectly normal. For a year, not so much.

For our sense of neighborhood, though, what a year, thanks to all of you. You've stood up, lifted your heads, opened your hearts, and reached out your hands to help others. You've risen to the occasion. Good for you! To all of you who:

- Helped neighbors in need,
- Sent messages of cheer to family, friends, and neighbors,
- Donated money and time to support non-profits,
- Sent crowd-sourced funding to save community institutions,
- Ordered take-out to help struggling restaurants,
- Helped serve food to the hungry,
- Volunteered in reimagined ways, like socially-distanced First Fridays,
- Served as unexpected substitute teachers,
- Explored the exciting frontiers of 24-7 family togetherness,
- Combined television, telephone, teleshopping, telework, and sometimes inter-family telepathy, all at the same time,
- Fought to master Zoom (sometimes successfully, sometimes not), and
- Kept your patience with the unmute button.

To all of you who have learned once again the true and full value of love, family, and community, to all of you who have struggled, coped, and ultimately overcome in a once-in-a-lifetime year—Thanks.

Now, welcome to 2021. Whew… maybe – almost certainly – a better year. A chance to build on all we've learned (and re-learned) about community. Building community, a bedrock of neighborhood. And, a core of THD's mission statement.

THD in 2020. Through it all (or maybe despite it all), THD has had a busy year in 2020.

- We fought for affordable housing, neighborhood preservation, small businesses, revitalized commercial spaces, safer streets, and protection of parks and trees.
- We advocated before City commissions. We won important victories.
- We built community. In person, when we could. Online, when we had to.
- We held virtual events. Great conversations with David Talbot, Aaron Peskin, and Tom Ammiano to name a few (recordings online at *THD.org/event-series*).
- We published a COVID-19 community resources website. (See *THD.org/covid-19*.)
- We organized and co-sponsored an online District 3 Supervisor candidate debate (recording online at *THD.org/debate*).
- We published quarterly issues of *The Semaphore*. Continuing to tell our stories for more than 60 years.
- We organized a virtual ballot measure discussion with Assemblymember David Chiu and Supervisor Aaron Peskin (recording online at *THD.org/ballot-measures*).

Just some of the things THD has been doing. A preview of things to come. THD working for us all.

Virtual Annual Meeting Update. Here's an update on our Virtual Annual Meeting. Hope you were able to be there (wherever "there" is, cyber-ly speaking). You might recall from *The Semaphore's* last issue that, while THD usually holds its Annual Meeting in April, with COVID-19 all about us, we delayed our Annual Meeting in hopes that it would become safe and permissible to get together again in person.

That, of course, did not happen. Undaunted, we decided to proceed with a Virtual Annual Meeting on October 13. As we hoped, the meeting was a big success online via Zoom, with many members participating. Carl Nolte, legendary journalist and "Native Son" columnist for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, was an outstanding featured speaker.

Our annual election for THD officers and directors was held, with members voting on the slate proposed by the Nominating Committee (as listed in previous issues of *The Semaphore* and distributed in member emails). Given the delay necessary this year, officers and directors for 2019-2020 continued their service in place pending this Annual Meeting. Members attending the meeting voted unanimously for the slate, with the same officers and directors as currently for 2020-2021, serving until the next Annual Meeting, with any luck in April 2021.

Through the years, THD has established an annual award recognizing and thanking people who have made outstanding contributions to Telegraph Hill, North Beach, and the Northeast Waterfront. And, to the citizens of San Francisco. Supervisor Aaron Peskin announced that THD's 2020 Outstanding Contribution to the Hill Award went to Howard Wong, recognizing him as follows:

> *"Telegraph Hill Dwellers honors you for your role as a neighborhood organizer and advocate committed to the citizens of our neighborhood and City, and for your success in ensuring that San Francisco remains a special place!"*

Our winner this year is an especially fine choice. We have come to rely heavily on his knowledge, thoughtfulness, and dedication, especially on matters dealing with transportation. Howard served on THD's board from 1996 to 1999, including a term as Vice President. Among other things, he is a founding member of NEXT Village SF and a founding member of SaveMUNI. He is President of the District 3 Democratic Club.

Remember, to join or to get information about THD, come to our website at *THD.org*, or send an email to *hello@THD.org*. If you'd like to get involved, just go to *THD.org/member-info*.

FROM THE EDITOR

INTO THE LIGHT

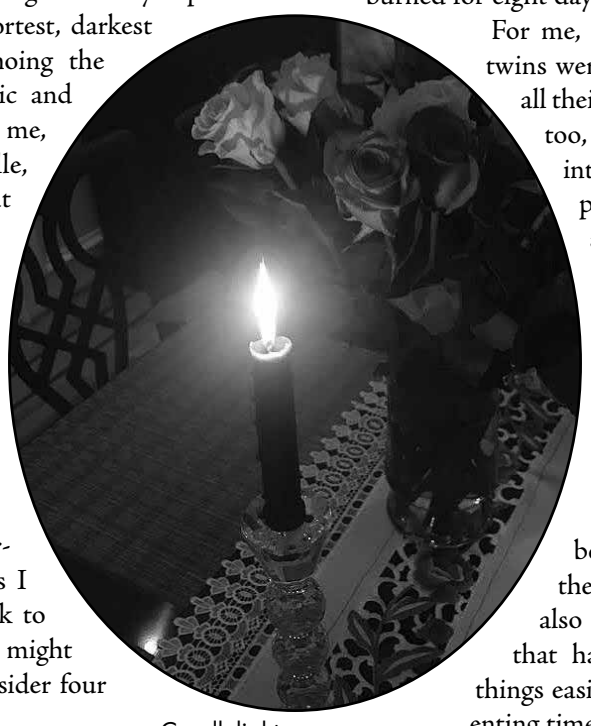
by Cap Caplan
cap.caplan@thd.org

In early December, I "Zoomed" to a Chanukah workshop led by Alison Laichter, a well-known yoga and meditation teacher. Entitled "Lighting Your Way: A Chanukah Meditation Workshop," the program was open to all.

Lighting candles (a traditional Jewish response to darkness), Alison spoke about light, starting with those candles, now bringing brightness into the room.

It is ironic that I am writing about my experience on Solstice Day, the shortest, darkest day of the year—a day echoing the dark trauma of the pandemic and the darkest days of 2020: for me, George Floyd, Charlottesville, Ruth Bader Ginsburg. But solstice also marks a beginning—the beginning of light that lasts longer each day—and the promise of tomorrow and the days after that.

"Here's to brighter days." "Finally, light at the end of the tunnel." Aren't these the kind of words we extend to one another as we look forward to this coming year? As I reflect on this, and think back to Alison, it occurs to me that it might be helpful for all of us to consider four questions she posed.



Candlelight. © David Lipkin

What brings light to my life?

There are big answers here, though frequently it's the garden variety things that brighten the day. For me, walking around my neighborhood, I see the shining lights on Christmas trees and bulbs tacked around windows, signs of hopefulness all. One cannot help but smile. And then there are thoughts of my children, laughter, tomorrow's Zoom call with my college classmates, my basset hound Ace lying tight against my leg.

How can I kindle that light?

To start, I can simply put up the blinds in my bedroom when I wake. In this year of isolation, too often the solution has been to curl up in a ball and pull up the covers. No more. It's time to savor every moment and each experience, no matter how small or fleeting.

What miracles have I experienced?

The Jewish tradition behind this question goes back to the victory in 167 BCE by the Maccabees, a loose band of Israelites, over the tyrant king Antiochus and his mighty army and their reclaiming of the holy temple in Jerusalem. They found only enough oil to light the temple's menorah for one night. And the oil burned for eight days.

For me, it is still miraculous that my twins were born perfectly healthy, with all their fingers and toes. Miraculous, too, how special people have come into my life at the most unexpected times. And, to me, it's a miracle that we now have effective COVID vaccines—not just the short development time, or the fact that they are based on so many different scientific approaches, some never tried before, but the fact of them at all.

It's important to remember the big marvels. However, the question invites one to think also simply of the positive things that have happened this past year, things easily passed over in these disorienting times.

What will I dedicate or rededicate myself to this year?

Putting myself in the light, whether by opening the blinds, writing postcards to influence votes in an important election, or fitting a pair of glasses to an individual at Project Homeless Connect. Even taking Ace on a longer walk, reminding myself to be more generous with dog treats.

Reconnecting with others, certainly. In person, up close, the way it's supposed to be. After we've all gotten vaccinated, of course.

COLE HARDWARE
• SINCE 1920 •
Cole. Hardware for the soul.
FOR ALL OF YOUR HOME, GARDEN, AND HARDWARE NEEDS!
627 VALLEJO STREET @ COLUMBUS
415-432-2653
COLEHARDWARE.COM

ART SAVES LIVES: THOMASINA DE MAIO'S 250 ART CLASSES OF 2020

by Romalyn Schmaltz

Portrait of Romalyn Schmaltz. Painting and photo © Thomasina deMaio

I first met Thomasina DeMaio in early February of 2020, back when words like 'coronavirus' and 'COVID' were mere whispers in the wind. It was a bright and crisp afternoon as I waltzed into Vesuvio Café on Columbus Avenue, where Thomasina had been offering free live oil portraits of local subjects for several weeks, a deal that struck me as incredibly generous. Although we'd never made our acquaintance in person, I'd been chatting with her online about her wildly prolific art life for a while and had no trouble locating her in the one-table window nook to the left of the entrance, easel and palette ready to roll.

Several things surprised me at once: For one, we had an instant rapport—so much so that I was worried whether she could capture my likeness with my mouth moving at warp speed—as if we were old friends. Moreover, she worked so quickly, not fussing as I tend to do when I paint in oils but playfully sailing around the canvas in bold, luscious brushstrokes reminiscent of the Post-Impressionists. An hour or so of irreverent-yet-intentional brush dances later, she announced that she was basically done and would take it home to add some finishing touches and let the drying process begin.

I'd gone into Vesuvio that day thinking I'd found a new great North Beach artist, but as it turns out, Thomasina has been an integral thread in our art community for nearly 50 years. She first came to North Beach in 1973 and was drawn immediately to the newly opened Keystone Korner, which was so named because of its proximity to our Central Police Station on Vallejo Street. "I'm doing paintings right now of the Keystone Korner from sketches I did back in the day of really well-known people—Horace Silver—I was able to get right next to him—and I was working for the Keystone, so I had backstage access. I was so young I didn't even realize the gravity of being there a foot and a half away from him doing his portrait, or [Charles] Mingus, for that matter. It was unbelievable—you were sitting there with Miles Davis in a venue that only had space for seven or eight people deep. The Keystone really reeked of North Beach, so that was my introduction to the neighborhood, and then I went to school later."

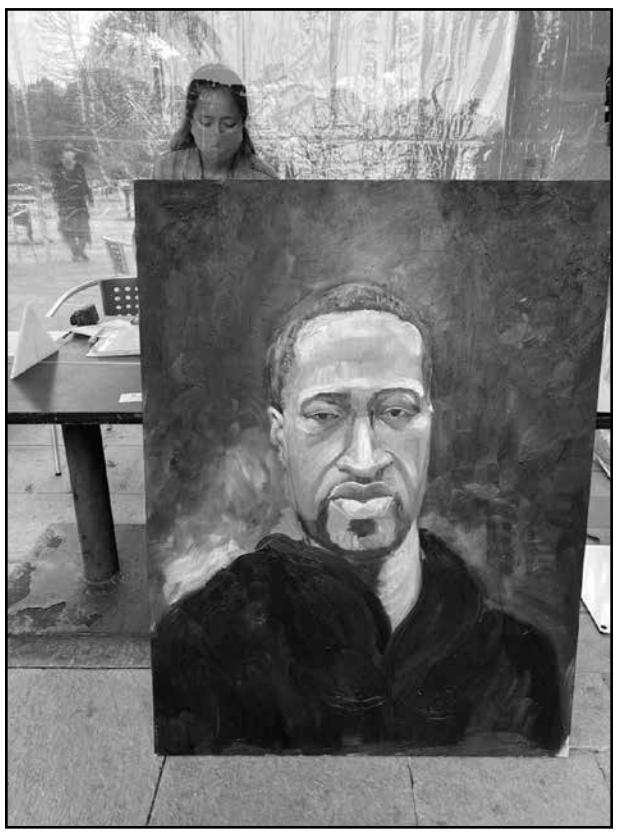
She went on to attend the nearby San Francisco Art Institute in 1979, earning a BFA and then an MFA in painting.

"I studied with Robert Colescott, one of the first really well-known Black artists who was a professor there. I had some fantastic teachers, although I had to fight upstream because the figure wasn't popular there at the time—everybody was pushing abstraction. Mainly Vesuvio was where we would gather when we weren't in the studio.

"Then I started the restaurant at the school, creating jobs for students there. I could plainly see just how inept most artists were at organizing, so the San Francisco Arts Commission used my restaurant space as a satellite for their art walks or open studios or whatever they were calling them at the time. That led me to thinking about how much I could do for other artists even though I was also needing support at the time. Women were not getting their fair share of anything at the school—it was kind of like 'MeToo' before there was MeToo."

Caffè Trieste. Painting and photo © Thomasina deMaio

Fast-forwarding some 40 years, during which she has been perpetually painting everything from portraits to landscapes to her dogs to ephemera like thumbtacks and power tools, we find Thomasina still leading artists, only for now online via the Zoom platform. She began her free art instruction group *Artsaveslives: Art in Isolation* before the lockdown even officially began, March 14. "And we've been doing six days a week, with only Mondays off, ever since. Tuesdays through Fridays we go from 12 to 2 pm (PST) and do different subjects like still lifes, interiors, and plein-air when possible, and then on the weekends we go from 12 to 3 pm with live models." All classes are free of charge and open to as many people as wish to participate, using any media they choose.



Portrait of George Floyd. Painting and photo © Thomasina deMaio

"People have really grown and their art has gotten so much better because they're disciplined now—they're getting used to doing it every day because they have nowhere else to go. It's great," she enthused. She went on to note that this kind of practice not only develops skills folks might not ordinarily find the time to hone, but it also provides a much-needed community during times of unprecedented uncertainty and stress. "We have people from all over, from San Salvador to Guerneville, Philadelphia to Los Angeles—and, of course, San Francisco." Classes range in size from a handful to more than 25 artists of all skill levels, with plenty of encouragement and no judgment.

But that's not all Thomasina's been up to in this crazy year. Following the Minneapolis murder of George Floyd in May, Thomasina did a large-scale portrait of the unarmed Black man killed by police officers, eventually becoming one of the 762 artists represented in the DeYoung Museum's "DeYoung Open," a salon exhibit of Bay Area artists that ran from October 10, 2020 through January 3, 2021. Competition was fierce, with more than 6,000 entrants, and Thomasina's portrait commanded a coveted center spot on an exhibit wall. I also had the honor of featuring her in the November 2020 iteration of North Beach First Fridays, where we set up a mini-exhibition of her work—including a portrait of founder Lawrence Ferlinghetti—in the display case next to the entrance. "It was so special to me," she confided, "because Lawrence had invited me to do a show there many years ago. So, it rather felt like coming home."

I asked Thomasina, since we're staring down the barrel of a second lockdown, what her take was on making and showing art in the coming year. "North Beach First Fridays is definitely one venue, and I've already been asked to show work outdoors at the Caffè Trieste, plus there's also the opportunity to do First Sundays in the Castro. I'm operating under the realistic assumption that anything going on is going to have to go on outside until at least after June of 2021. But we'll keep doing it as long as we can, as long as we have to. Art really does save lives—it's essential."

There are those folks who just know how to foster and sustain a community, even when we cannot be together, and she's certainly on the top of my list of creative organizers.

Thomasina DeMaio invites you to join her online Zoom art sessions at your leisure. (The Zoom number is 3018891815, and you can contact her through Facebook or Instagram for more information.) Maybe I'll see you there?

Portrait of Grant Miller. Painting and photo © Thomasina deMaio

DISTRICT 3 SUPERVISOR REPORT

2020 YEAR IN REVIEW

by Supervisor Aaron Peskin
aaron.peskin@sfgov.org

The Year of Heartbreak & Resilience

It seems like an eternity since I penned the last Supervisor's "Year in Review." Hard to believe that at this time last year, we were celebrating major ballot victories, small business wins, and the re-opening of Washington Square. Only two months later, my Chief of Staff and I were helping set up the City's Emergency Operations Center as the entire city locked down in response to the pandemic. At the time, we hoped it would be a matter of a few months before we were able to resume daily life safely but were preparing for the worst. And here we are, almost a year later, ten months marked by heartbreak and resilience.

Parks, Transportation, & Small Business Recovery

At the end of 2019, we celebrated the passage of my Uber/Lyft per ride fee, which passed by the skin of its teeth with a hair more than 2/3 of the vote. At the end of the first quarter of its inaugural fiscal year, we've allocated the first $7 million for critical Muni and pedestrian safety projects, as we grapple with closing a gaping public transportation funding deficit. This past November, all three Bay Area counties passed Supervisor Shamann Walton's and my Caltrain sales tax, which included long-awaited governance and accountability measures.

We also celebrated small business victories at the end of 2019, including a Small Business Relief program that has ultimately become a permanent fixture during the pandemic. My office has legislated fee waivers and permit streamlining measures, led the City's "Shared Spaces" program development, and implemented a Commercial Eviction Moratorium citywide.

It's not enough, though, and we know the road to full recovery for our commercial corridors and small business employees will be hard. My office is committed to continuing to lead on this front, while pushing the Office of Economic & Workforce Development to rethink completely its budget with a focus on direct grants to small businesses and for City Departments like DPW, DBI, Planning, and DPH to deliver timely issuance of health and safety permits. In the meantime, I am working with SF New Deal and the Human Services Agency to reinstate the successful Feed + Fuel program paying Chinatown restaurants to serve culturally appropriate and nutritious meals 3x a day to seniors and families living in our cramped SRO's, who are all hanging on by a thread.

Last year at this time, we were also celebrating the sustainable upgrade of North Beach's living room, Washington Square, which included an overhaul of the Park's irrigation and drainage system in order to save up to 2.2 million gallons of water annually. Although Rec&Park's budget has also been hard hit by the pandemic, we managed to secure $54 million in this past November's bond measure to renovate Portsmouth Square. Public open space is more important than ever, and my office will continue our work to prioritize those most in need of safe space for recreation, particularly our seniors and kids who have been particularly hard hit by the epidemic. My staff have been meeting regularly with RPD, Library and DCYF staff to ensure our children have safe spaces to learn and recreate safely, pushing SFMTA to prioritize neighborhood stewardship of mini Slow Streets and joining the growing movement of parents calling on SFUSD to generate a clear and reasonable plan to reopen our schools when DPH deems it safe to do so.

Homelessness & Housing

Finally, we have been working hard, even before the pandemic, to address the heartbreaking crisis of homelessness on our city streets. We recently launched the City's first-ever Mental Health SF crisis response team, which is dispatched through the 9-1-1 Call Center. Thanks to the hard work of my staff and the Housing Accelerator Fund, we were able to apply for and win two significant State grants to acquire both the Granada Hotel and the Diva Hotel in District 3, the only grants awarded in San Francisco, for a total of 362 units of permanent supportive housing for individuals transitioning out of homelessness.

These, in addition to two other SRO acquisitions in the District, the opening of the City's first transgender homeless housing, and the imminent opening of the City's first Transitional Age Youth Navigation Center are rewards for hard work.

I could rehash every trial and tribulation over the past year, but I know you've all been living the reality every day. I'm thankful that you've put your trust in me to serve a final term as your Supervisor and am ready to continue the work of recovery together. My entire office has been working non-stop over the last year, and our thoughts are constantly with every single one of our community members.

Here's to a new year of less heartache and struggle and more togetherness and joy.

See you around the neighborhood,

Aaron

Join the Telegraph Hill Dwellers!
Go to *thd.org* and become part of this active community!

LIVE WORMS GALLERY
a space for the appreciation of creative pursuits
livewormsongrant.com
eastudio@comcast.com
1345 Grant Avenue SF
Elizabeth Ashcroft, Proprietor
Green Vellajo LWG Grant Columbus Broadway

Phone: 415-398-3181
www.sottomaresf.com
sotto.mare@outlook.com
SOTTO MARE
OYSTERIA & SEAFOOD
"The Best Damn Cioppino!"
Seafood • Pasta • Fish Market • Banquet Room for up to 30 Guests
In San Francisco's "Little Italy"
552 Green Street (between Columbus & Grant)
North Beach, San Francisco, CA 94133

YOUR NORTH BEACH PURVEYORS SINCE 2011
CHEESEMONGER . WINE MERCHANT . GROCERY
1541 GRANT AVENUE . BETWEEN UNION + FILBERT
LITTLE VINE.NB

MetalworksSF Spring 2021 classes available for enrollment now! Please check our website for your choice of dates and class availability.
METALWORKSSF.COM

Portofino
SEA FOOD CO. Est. 1937
1318 Grant Ave.
San Francisco, CA 94133
(415) 400-5776
thefishofours@yahoo.com

THE ITALIAN HOMEMADE Company
North Beach
716 Columbus Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94133
+1 (415) 712 8874
Marina
1919 Union Street
San Francisco, CA 94123
+1 (415) 655 9325
Berkeley
2905 College Avenue
Berkeley, CA 94705
+1 (510) 649 1495
Hayes Valley
1 Franklin Street
San Francisco, CA 94102
+1 (415) 757 0877
Los Angeles
online orders
Long Beach
coming soon!
italianhomemade.com

NORTH BEACH CITIZENS
Hope.
Compassion.
Generosity.
northbeachcitizens.org
1034 Kearny Street
San Francisco, CA 94133
415-772-0918

HOUSEPLANT HERO

by Katherine Petrin

I avoid houseplants. They are nice in other people's houses, but I have had bad luck keeping them alive and feel terrible when they inevitably droop and expire under my watch. When my friend Nicole gifted me with a houseplant in 2018, I thought, "This will not end well." She gave me a beautiful rubber plant with variegated leaves of green and pink that unfurl from deep magenta shoots. Knowing its likely fate, I said, "Maybe you should keep it." Nicole dismissed my ungracious response, reminding me of the benefits of living with healthy houseplants: a fresher environment; toxin-free air; an agreeable, silent roommate. She encouraged me to give it a try.

To my surprise, Mr. Rubberman and I hit it off. He thrives in a nice spot with indirect light and weekly water. Not so difficult. Every day I greet him, "Good morning" and delight in seeing frequent, new shoots. After two happy years, I noticed the proportion of plant to pot was not right. I saw a few fine threads of roots under the pot. I was dreading the thought of moving him into a bigger pot, certain that transplanting him myself would be the end of Mr. Rubberman.

One day in mid-December, while on my way to Graffeo Coffee on Columbus Avenue, I noticed a new shop on the block, Cloud-Hidden Plants, in the space formerly occupied by Bauhaus Gallery, Piccolo Press, Juicy Lucy's, and other businesses over the decades.

Cloud-Hidden Plants opened in July, 2020. Owned and operated by Anisse, a long-term North Beach resident and Anthony, her British partner, the pair lease the space from Flora Gaspar, former owner of the still beloved Da Flora Restaurant and proprietor of the adjacent Rialto Mercato.

The shop is bright, light, and airy, the interior filled with shelves offering a well-curated mix of ceramic pots and household wares, all locally made. The overall aesthetic is pleasing and invites perusing mostly because of the unusual plants like cacti, caudiciforms, succulents, other botanical oddities, including owner favorites, Pachypodiums, Euporbia Obesas, and Lithops.

After chatting with Anthony, I chose a terra cotta pot in an atypical shade of warm gray for Mr. Rubberman. Anthony re-potted him for me at a reasonable price, same day service. I memorized his words of plant-health advice. I also asked the obvious…"A new business venture at this time?"

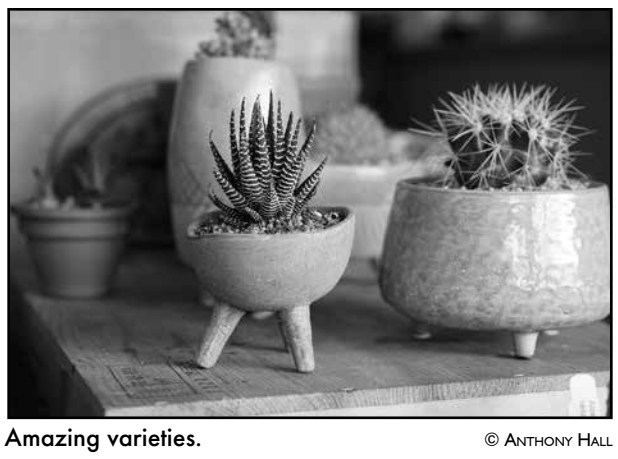
Anthony explained it was not exactly their preference to open a business in Month Five of a global pandemic. The lease had been signed the previous December. The concept, however, evolved over the last few years as a result of Anthony's appreciation for desert plants cultivated by many visits to arid climes in Southern California and Arizona. Though not formally trained in botany, Anthony worked in nurseries and gardens in the UK during his teenage years. Photos of favorite plants posted to his Instagram account became the seed of the business and led to a brand identity before the actual retail concept came together. He and Anisse turned his casual hobby into a new storefront business in North Beach. Anthony expressed gratitude for the genuine support from neighbors and customers for a new local business. He appreciates the "true neighborhoody-ness" of North Beach and Telegraph Hill.

If you're in the mood for a new plant, I recommend Cloud-Hidden Plants at 703 Columbus. You'll find Anthony in the shop Wednesdays through Sundays, from 11 am to 7 pm. As for Mr. Rubberman, he went from the pot equivalent of a cramped studio to an airy 2-bedroom with a bay view. He tells me he's loving the new space.

Bonus Question: Readers may recognize the literary inspiration for the business name. Send your guess via email to *hello@thd.org*. The first response with the correct answer will win a $20 gift certificate to Cloud-Hidden Plants, courtesy of the THD Board.

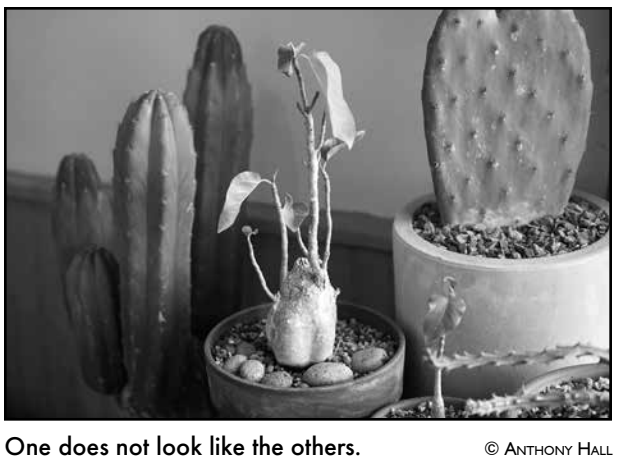
Toto, we're not in Arizona anymore. © Anthony Hall

Truly a cornucopia of plants. © Anthony Hall


Amazing varieties. © Anthony Hall

Each succulent a unique shape. © Anthony Hall

Large or small, plants for all. © Anthony Hall


One does not look like the others. © Anthony Hall

MY GODFATHER WAS JOE CONFORTE

by Charles Versaggi

Few people can say their spiritual growth was entrusted to an actual "Godfather"—not just the religious kind but also the "Don" kind—the black sheep of our extended Sicilian family: Giuseppe Conforte, aka Joe Conforte, the world-reputed King of Prostitution, founder of Nevada's most notorious house of ill repute—the Mustang Ranch.

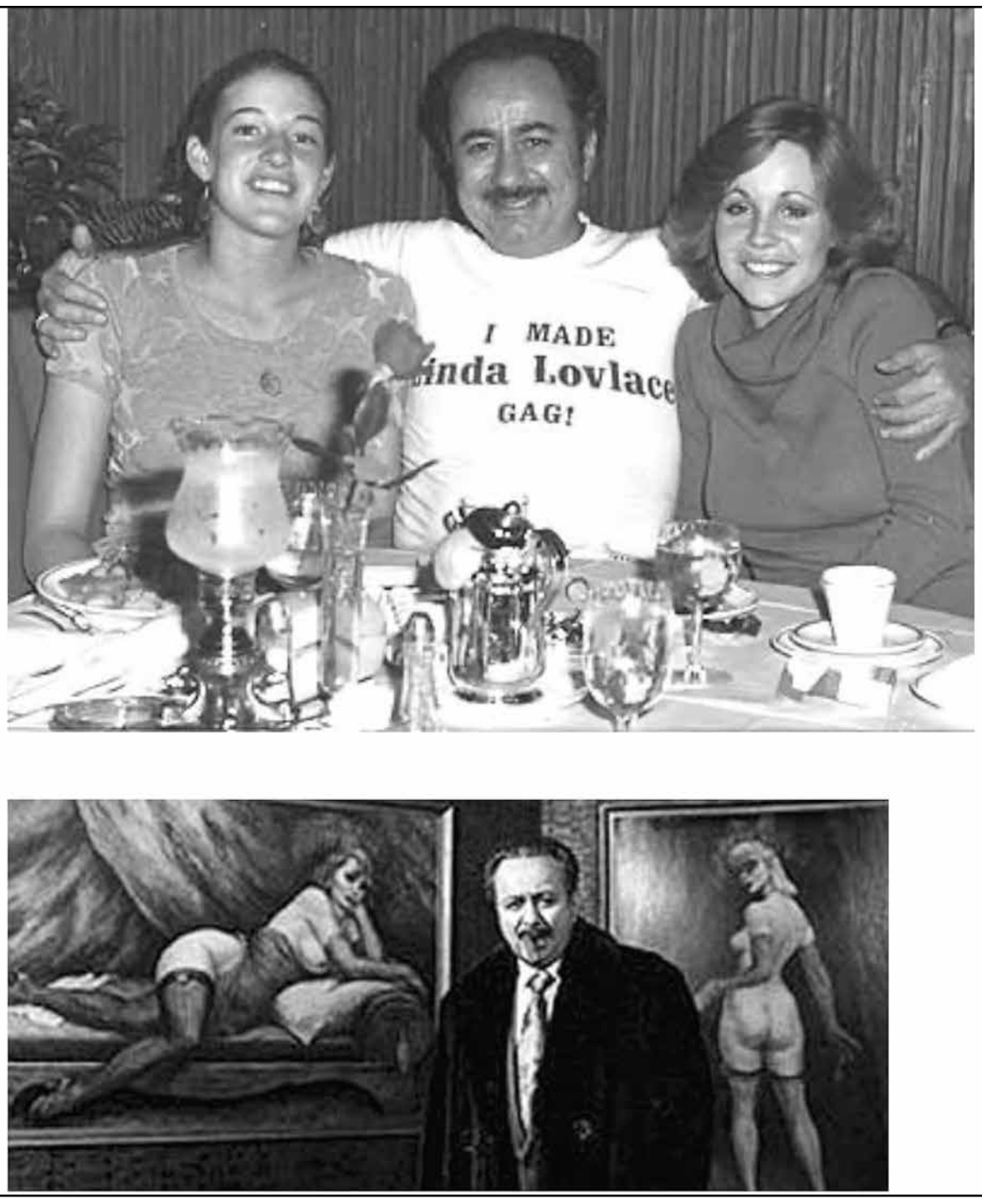
My Catholic baptism was consecrated by Rev. Matthew J. Cravero at Saints Peter and Paul Church in San Francisco's North Beach neighborhood, as my godparents Joe and his sister Lina (short for Pasqualina, It: "Little Easter") solemnly recited their vows to protect me from evil toward everlasting grace with God. Standing nearby with proud and watchful eyes, my parents Saverio and Annie Versaggi completed the ritual prayers that would someday secure my soul's passport to heaven.

The year was 1947. I was 16 months old, an only child coddled by doting Italian parents living in the heart of the City's *Italianita* ("Little Italy"), conceived in Sicily and born just in time to be a bona fide U.S. citizen. My dad had just returned from WWII, a decorated *Bersagliere* commando for the Royal Italian Army, after defeating the Nazis at Monte Casino with the Allied forces. Joe Conforte, the immigrant son of an uneducated Boston boot-legger, was an MP at Fort Ord, Monterey, spending his weekends (often AWOL) blowing his paycheck in Reno.

Although he was narcissistic and didn't fit into the Italian mobster-family stereotype, Conforte somehow found the time to join his sister to be my *cumpari*—godfather, and *cumare*—godmother. (Sicilian friends often greet each other with "Hey, gumbah!" *Eh cumpari* is also the title of a traditional Sicilian folk song.)

Three years later, Conforte would be driving a Luxury Cab (Yellow Cab wouldn't hire him), taking sailors from Oakland to North Beach's steamy International Settlement to hook up with prostitutes at $3 a trick. Formerly known as "The Latin Quarter," renowned for its brothels near the Embarcadero and Telegraph Hill, North Beach was the hot spot for sex and drugs. (Rock and roll would come later.)

In 1952, he would start his first brothel with a couple of women at Oakland's Wagner Hotel on 16th and Clay Streets, across from the local police station where he made a deal with Lieutenant Riley, head of the vice squad.



Joe Conforte and friends. (Conforte Facebook page)

Breaks, Brains, and Balls

"If you want to operate low and discreet, all we want is a couple of hundred dollars a week. A thousand dollars a month, and I'll see that you're left alone," Conforte recounts in his autobiography, *Breaks, Brains and Balls (2011)*, a loose chronology of his life that uncovers the intimate underbelly of his brothel. After 20 years of following Conforte's infamous path to fame, David Toll, 84, co-authored the book. Toll is the retired publisher of *The Gold Hill News* where Conforte would advertise the Ranch's services in the mid-70s. In the 60s, Toll also worked as an all-night DJ at KGO radio in San Francisco.

Conforte vaingloriously writes, "It took breaks, brains and balls every step of the way, from a street-smart runaway kid in New York City to owning the Mustang Ranch in the Nevada desert, putting millions into a Swiss bank account, getting away to Brazil, and then going on the run from Interpol, always one little mistake away from losing everything. And I made it! I beat them all!"

Twenty-five years after his cab-driving days, the pudgy, gravelly voiced Sicilian—sporting a pencil moustache, chewing $18 smuggled Cuban cigars, and wearing elevator wingtips and a $4,000 hair transplant—would be driving a customized, bulletproof "Bugazzi," the ultimate pimpmobile. A reporter described it as a Lincoln Continental Mark IV looking like "Moby Dick

Private Joe Conforte, U.S. Army. (Conforte Facebook page)

Lina (Conforte) and husband Frank Micale, Augusta, Sicily. (Versaggi family photo)

Giuseppina and Sebastiano Romeo with their children Annie (Charles' mother), Joe, and Jack in Augusta, Sicily. (Versaggi family photo)

and Aquaman had gotten crazy during spring break on the Island of Dr. Moreau."

Located in Storey County, 20 miles east of Reno, the Mustang Ranch became Nevada's first state-licensed brothel in 1971, which eventually led to the legalization of brothel prostitution in 10 of the state's 17 counties. Starting in a ramshackle trailer in 1955 as the Triangle River Ranch Whorehouse, although now closed temporarily due to the COVID pandemic, the notorious bordello is purportedly America's largest and most profitable brothel.

Conforte's clients included police and police commissioners, legislators, U.S. senators, priests and rabbis, and a lot more. Despite having so many friends in high places, he spent much of his life fighting the government and legitimizing his brothel and his life.

At his peak, Conforte was a fearless folk hero, a national celebrity, and a political power broker whose story was told many times in books, newspapers, and magazines, including a 1972 cover story in *Rolling Stone*. Coverage of his corrupt politics won Warren Lerude, Norman Cardoza, and Foster Church of the *Nevada State Journal* and *Reno Evening Gazette* the 1977 Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing.

Conforte and the Mustang Ranch were featured on The Phil Donahue Show (1991), and his whirlwind life was even the subject of a big-budget Hollywood movie, *Love Ranch* (2010), starring Joe Pesci as Conforte and Helen Mirren as Sally Burgess, his steadfast wife and business partner. The movie alludes to the mysterious circumstances surrounding the death of famous Argentinian-Italian heavyweight boxer Oscar "Ringo" Bonavena, who lost to Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier. Critics panned the movie: "Despite its saucy setup and the always marvelous Helen Mirren, *Love Ranch* is disappointingly flaccid."

The Conforte family Fina, Francesca, mother Francesca, brother John, Joe (seated), and Lina, Augusta, Sicily.

(Conforte family photo)

Don Conforte

"J.C." fancied himself the benevolent "Capo dei Capi" godfather of Storey County, crusading to legalize the world's oldest profession as a "community service." Prone to philanthropic excess, he would annually donate 1,000 turkeys to the poor, and once offered brothel passes to any Desert Storm veteran with 24 hours to spare, which cost him $400,000.

"He loved the sense of being a Don. He ran the Mustang Ranch like his own personal scene. It was like Don Corleone but Don Conforte," Toll said in a recent video interview, "because Conforte had the prototype images in his head very deep. He took a lot of that from the 'Godfather' movies. He watched 'Godfather II' I don't know how many times."

People either loved or hated Conforte. Either way, he was proud of his vocation. "There were some who despised him as a guy who was taking advantage of them, and there were women who idolized him as a person who put money in their pockets and for looking after them. He was the 'master of the household'—the Don who would hold court and dish out rewards and punishments," Toll added.

"One of my favorite recollections came about when we were talking about something that made the paper," Toll recounted with a sly smile. "He was described as a 'whorehouse tycoon.' Conforte was incensed. 'Whorehouse! Whorehouse! I own a gravel pit, you know!'"

San Francisco's International Settlement on Pacific Ave. in the North Beach district, 1947. (Bancroft Library)

Il Comparaggio

Of all the social kinships nourished by Catholic dogma and tradition, the godparent relationship—"il comparaggio"—is strongly rooted in Mediterranean Latin cultures, especially Sicily. Traditionally relegated to relatives or close friends of the family, godparents are responsible for protecting the child against witches and "malocchio"—the evil eye. (My maternal grandmother would warn me to be ever so vigilant about evil women who could cast a spell over you by putting their menstrual blood in your coffee.)

Witchcraft and evil embody ancient themes in Sicilian culture. The *Trinacria* (referring to the three main promontories of the island), as the center symbol on the Sicilian flag is known, features the mythological Medusa–the snake-coiffed goddess known for her abilities to fight the forces of evil and turn men to stone.

A godparent should serve as an authentic example of Christian charity—someone who could demonstrate holiness of life. What were my parents thinking?!

Oddly, I never met Joe and Lina Conforte, though my parents would sheepishly tell me stories about them. The Conforte family and my mother's family—the Romeos—were from Augusta, a small fishing village on the southeast coast of Sicily where their children played together before emigrating to the U.S. Their lives would intersect again after WWII ended when the Confortes wended their way from Boston to California, and eventually Nevada, and my family joined the North Beach Italian community. My godmother Lena Conforte married a Sicilian, Frank Micale, and settled down in a Los Angeles suburb.

Mussolini's Influence

A *Fascista* in his youth, Conforte liked being compared to Mussolini. In his book, Conforte recalled Il Duce's glory days during his childhood, "Hey, Mussolini wasn't a bad guy," he once said. "His mistake was joining up with Hitler."

"Mussolini put up slogans on the walls that you would see when you took the train or went bicycling. There is one I will never forget: 'It is better to live one day like a lion than 100 years like a sheep.'"

My mother once told me that when she was 15 years old, Mussolini came to visit the throng of admiring citizens of Augusta. As his entourage passed her midst a crowd of cheering admirers, she briefly glanced in his eyes and kissed his extended hand. She was as thrilled as a rock groupie.

For 25 years, every March 19, Joe Conforte would return to his poverty-stricken childhood in Augusta to celebrate the Feast of Saint Joseph and auction. Saint Joseph is regarded by Sicilians as the island's patron saint for preventing a famine during the Middle Ages with a bumper crop of fava beans.

Wearing a mink fur coat and an 8-carat diamond ring, he was regaled by everyone, especially the recipients of generous contributions he would provide. Everywhere Conforte went, he stuffed money into outstretched hands. Among other causes, the auction helped to raise funds for the Chiesa Madre (Mother Church) and the Chiesa di San Domenico (St. Domenic's Church). The latter's ornate wooden doors, pews, and confessionals were hand-carved by my paternal grandfather, Salvatore Versaggi.

Saved by an Illegitimate Daughter

Conforte's legacy ends in 1986 when he escapes

The Trinacria symbol on the Sicilian flag.

federal authorities for tax evasion, on the lam from Interpol, hiding from Chile and other countries, ending up in Brazil, paying $10,000 a month to a local police chief to stay under cover.

"He was a very smart guy—he had a daughter (Annabella) who was born in Brazil," Toll said. "He imported one of the Ranch girls who had become pregnant, presumably by him, and took her to Brazil to give birth there. Brazilian law forbids the extradition of anyone with a Brazilian dependent. When the case came before the country's supreme court, they unanimously decided he couldn't be extradited because the offenses in the U.S. were not crimes in Brazil. He didn't always think ahead, but he sure did that time."

The One Word Conforte Despised

Joe Conforte died in 2019 at the age of 94 in Rio de Janeiro, long retired from trying to legitimize his illegitimate life. Lina Conforte died in 2010 at the age of 90 in Los Angeles, three years after the death of her naturalized Sicilian husband Frank Micale. Her obituary didn't mention her brother Joe.

Many sobriquets were used to describe Conforte: whorehouse tycoon, the godfather of Storey County, whoremaster, Mr. Madame, even Joe Joy House. During the Ranch's early days, my mother and her brothers, Joe and Jack Romeo, once visited Conforte. Upon seeing my uncle Jack, Conforte abruptly slammed the door in his face because he once called Conforte the one word he despised: 'Pimp.'

I'm proud of my Sicilian family and colorful heritage. (Who knows, Joe and Lina Conforte might greet

Joe Conforte at the top of his game. (Pahrump Valley Times)

me at the Pearly Gates.) Conforte's "morality" is not my family's. Regardless of your views on sex work, like death and taxes, I don't think the world's oldest profession will ever go away.

"There are good people who do good things, there are bad people who do bad things. But to get a good person to do a bad thing takes religion." —Bill Maher

© Charles Versaggi 2020

Charles Versaggi is a native San Franciscan of Italian-Sicilian heritage. His current project is "North Beach Light," a collection of photo essays that reflect on his early years of living in North Beach when it was the City's "Italianita" and the center of Beat lifestyle, topless bars, and jazz clubs, leading to flower power and the "Summer of Love." Contact: charlesversaggi@me.com.

TRANSPORTATION REPORT

MUNI BUDGET CRISIS AND POTENTIAL LAYOFFS

by Joey Babbitt and Howard Wong, Committee Co-Chairs
jrbabbitt@gmail.com howard.wong@thd.org,

Despite major cost cuts and without new federal funds, the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) faces budget deficits of $68 million in this fiscal year and $168 million in the following year, posing unprecedented layoffs of 1,226 full-time employees—22 percent of SFMTA's workforce. Such massive cuts will worsen Muni's maintenance, operations, and service levels. Besides tapping more budget reserves, the Transit Workers Union 2 has discussed unpaid furloughs and early retirement incentives. To balance the last two budgets, $373.8 million of federal CARES Act funding has been used. Transit agencies across the country have lobbied for more federal help. A proposed bipartisan Covid-19 Relief Bill allocates $45 billion for transportation, of which $15 billion is for mass transit.

MUNI TUNNEL REDO

Just two years after a $50 million renovation of the Twin Peaks Tunnel, SFMTA announced that some work will need to be redone—costing tens of millions of dollars, closing the tunnel for months, and delaying full restart of Muni Metro. In August, the newly opened light rail system abruptly closed when new metal splices at overhead wires broke.

City supervisors, who also serve as County Transportation Authority directors, demanded better management oversight after multiple boondoggles, like the Van Ness Bus Rapid Transit and the Central Subway. Surface trains and buses will be phased into service. In the next decades, a huge backlog of deferred maintenance and capital improvements includes $3.2 billion of equipment replacements.

MUNI ADDING BUS LINES

Improving transit where buses are crowded or scarce, SFMTA will restore several bus routes, including modified versions of the 27 Bryant, 33 Ashbury/18th Street, and 55 Dogpatch. At the behest of the Bayview and Hunters Point neighborhoods and pushed by Supervisor Shamann Walton, Muni will establish a new temporary route called the '15 Bayview-Hunters Point Express' to connect southeastern areas to downtown.

Community members have long expressed a desire to reestablish the reliable 15 Third Street bus route, eliminated by the opening of the T-Line (Central Subway Phase 1) in 2007. Not only did T-Line construction damage the Third Street business corridor, but it decreased transit service levels to transit-dependent southeast neighborhoods. Similarly, the T-Line's elimination of the 15 Kearny bus, which connected Fisherman's Wharf to the financial district and downtown, decreased transit reliability in the northeast neighborhoods. Muni should re-establish the 15 Kearny bus line, too.

Watch for more buses coming back into service. © Howard Wong

CENTRAL SUBWAY DELAYS AND COST OVERRUNS

Originally scheduled to open in December 2018, the project is now delayed into 2022. Project reports currently show a $35 million cost overrun, although the new Program Manager forecasted a total $55 million cost overrun. Covid-19 delays will likely increase deficits.

The Central Subway is more a political and land-use project than a transportation project. Otherwise, after the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake, new bus routes or free bus loops could have connected Downtown to Chinatown and Fisherman's Wharf. With $15 million in annual operating costs, which SFMTA lacks, the subway's opening should be delayed and funds spent on the overall Muni system. Given shortened stations and maximum 2-car lengths, the Central Subway has limited capacity, making it wiser to increase frequency in the Market Street corridor. Rather than wasting 32 years for a tiny subway, and tearing up streets and businesses, San Francisco could have transformed the entire citywide Muni system years ago.

PUBLIC REALM AT TIPPING POINT

Neighborhood businesses have built stellar dining spaces at sidewalks and streets, investing much in structural, lighting, heating and design elements. The recently passed Proposition H will streamline permitting processes. But new stay-at-home orders threaten the survival of San Francisco's 1,200 remaining storefronts, after 1,300 businesses have already closed permanently. Saving the character and soul of our neighborhoods will require government assistance, loans, payroll/rent/eviction protections and our loyal patronage.

BETTER MARKET STREET PLAN

Controversy revolves around the stripped-down design of the proposed first phase of construction, due to Covid-19's impact on the city budget. Cutting costs from $184 million to $121 million means deferring sidewalk widenings from Van Ness to the Embarcadero, new sidewalk pavers, and separated bike lanes.

PARKS & TREES REPORT

PARKS AND OPEN SPACE PROGRESS IN 2020

by Don Raichle, Committee Chair
donraichle@thd.org

Without much regret, most of us can say goodbye and good riddance to 2020. Living through the Covid- 19 pandemic, with its social, economic, and health impacts has been a challenge for everyone. It has changed how we live and what we value. One of these changes has been the increased value of getting outdoors, both to escape the confines of our homes and to take advantage of the extra room to spread out into our own individual "spaces."

At the beginning of the pandemic, parks were closed and outside activity wasn't encouraged. However, as more was learned about how the virus spread, use of masks was mandated and accepted, access to open space was allowed and encouraged, as long as healthy practices were followed. While some still aren't as diligent and respectful as they should be in following the rules, the parks remain open and are serving a critical role in providing some relief in these difficult times. Fortunately, our local parks received recent upgrades, allowing them to accommodate this need, before city services and budgets came under stress. A brief overview of how our local and nearby open spaces are doing shows that many are in better shape and making more progress than they have in years and are one of the few things we can be thankful for during 2020.

Trees and restored views at Pioneer Park. © Don Raichle.

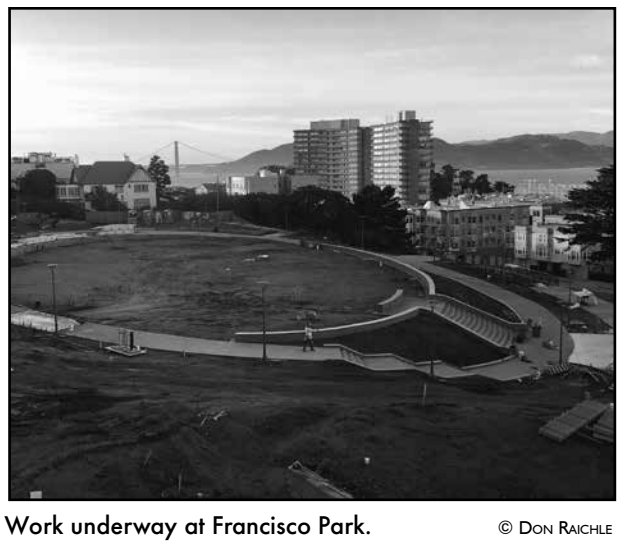
Washington Square Park

The beginning of the year brought with it the reopening of the Square. In December 2019, the new paving, lawn, irrigation, planting, and drainage were unveiled. Unfortunately, things got off to a rocky start with drainage issues, the loss of an additional tree and poor performance by the new turf. After months of monitoring, overseeding of lawn, and replacement of the damaged Monterey pine at the playground, the Park is generally doing well. The barriers around the shrub areas have been effective in getting those plants off to a healthy start, and the paving is a vast improvement over the old broken-up asphalt.

While the lawn is still presenting some concerns and causes are being debated, it is making progress. That being said, maintaining a lawn in an intensely used public open space is a challenge and continued local pressure is needed to ensure Recreation and Parks (Rec/Park) provides the attention and maintenance needed to meet the promised expectations. One new consideration for the Park is the installation of a safety fence or railing on the south side of the playground to prevent small children from racing out into traffic. Residents noted that there have been several close calls, and, as a result, Rec/Park is studying options to address this. THD will be tracking the progress of the design and will press for public input to ensure that, whatever is proposed, is a positive addition to the Park if it goes forward. Given the lack of available funds, actual implementation of the initiative is not in the near future.

Pioneer Park

While not as front and center as Washington Square Park, the top of our hill has made significant strides over the last couple of years. Recent thinning and removal of trees has greatly improved the overall health of the Park's landscape. Since the initial pruning, canopies have filled in and the Cypress trees surround-



Work underway at Francisco Park. © Don Raichle

MEMBERSHIP ENGAGEMENT REPORT

by Nick Ferris, Committee Chair
nick.ferris@thd.org

It's been a busy year for the Member Engagement Committee. As members know, THD has shifted its events to all-virtual. Welcome to the world of Zoom and Zoom Fatigue. (It's real!) One of the benefits of hosting virtual events is that it's much easier to get speakers and panelists, particularly with shelter-in-place orders. Member engagement also achieved larger attendance from members and non-members, as neither transportation nor large spaces were needed. Indeed, our largest webinar of 2020 hosted 538 screens, and, presumably, there were multiple folks behind some screens!

The most recent webinar, held near the end of October, was a ballot forum focusing on the 25 state and local propositions we would vote on the following month. Remember those??? How is a voter expected to be an expert on such a wide range of complex issues? THD was very fortunate to have Assemblymember David Chiu and Supervisor Aaron Peskin walk us through each of these measures. It was an insightful and highly educational event, so we hope to do it again for future voting cycles. The event was put together on short notice and inspired by our friends at the Barbary Coast Neighborhood Association, which did a similar event, so a big thank you to the organization.

Looking at the year ahead, there will be lots more activities in 2021. If you'd like to get involved, learn more about what's happening at THD, or simply suggest ideas for future events, please email me: *nick.ferris@thd.org*.

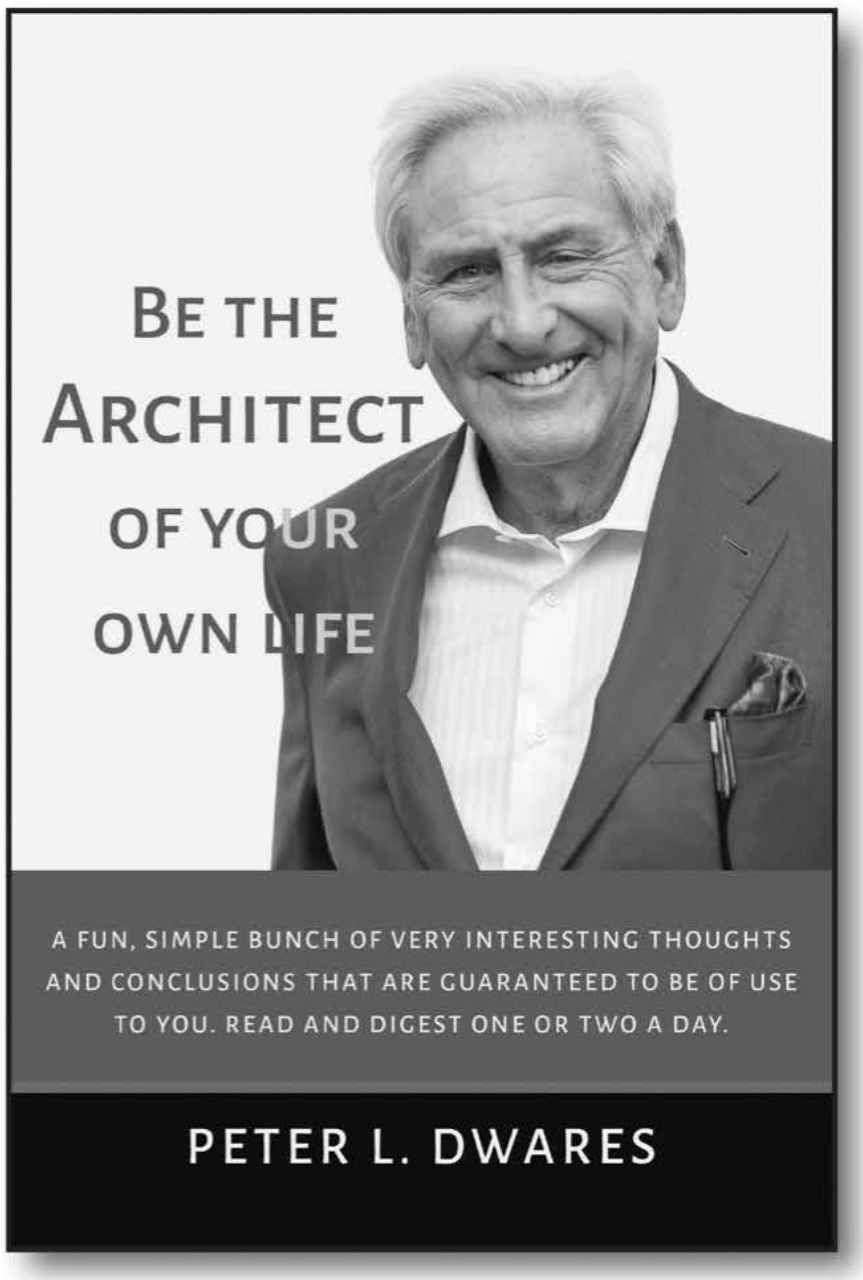
"I have been enjoying countless passages in Peter Dwares informative, funny, page turner "Be the Architect of Your Own Life".

"A philosophy for people who want to excel in business or just live better. "Filled with wisdom and fun."

"Be the Architect of Your Own Life is one of the best self help books I've read."

"Peter Dwares is a Renaissance Man of the first order. Successful real estate developer, author, Founder of Pathways for Kids, especially interested in international issues, thoughtful, engaged."

Available at
pldwares@aol.com
or call 415.986.5885
$15 per book
All profits go to
Pathways For Kids
501 (c) (3)



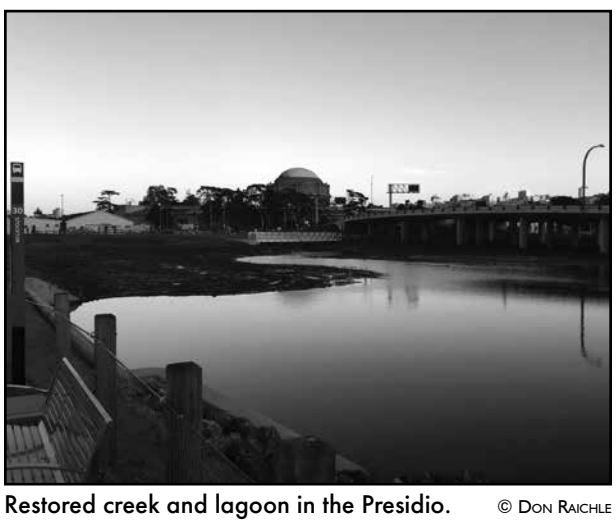
PARKS & TREES *continued*

ing the parking lot actually have a "normal" appearance. Best of all, the views to the Bay, waterfront, and Golden Gate Bridge are back. Planting of the understory below the removed Cypress trees and determining what, if anything, will take the place of the Christopher Columbus statue still need to be addressed, but, overall, the work at the Park has been a significant success.

Other Nearby Projects

While not within our immediate neighborhood, the old Francisco Reservoir site is in the process of being transformed to a new park. Because it is difficult to see what's going on there unless you are driving down Hyde Street, the magnitude of the change will surprise most locals who only see the imposing ramp visible from Bay Street. When completed, the park will include a large open lawn with great Bay views, a children's play area, and community gardens. The park, which was substantially privately funded, is slated to open in 2021.

Crissy Field, while further away is still an important destination for our neighbors and the City as a whole. Progress related to improvements to Doyle Drive (now known as "Presidio Parkway") have been moving slowly along over the last several years, but another significant milestone is within sight. Construction of the park's extension over the new parkway's tunnels is finally making progress. This work includes pedestrian connections between the Presidio Parade Ground and the lower park and beach. The project also expands the lagoon and restores the creek and associated wetland habitat in the "Quartermaster Reach" between Mason Street and Presidio Parkway.



Restored creek and lagoon in the Presidio. © Don Raichle

MARITIME
WINE TASTING STUDIO

Since 2008 we've been importing wines from around the world and making wine in our home state of California. We're your neighborhood tasting room and bottle shop with over 150 wines to choose from.

222 COLUMBUS AVENUE AT KEARNY
MARITIMETASTING.COM

MARITIMEWINECO
MARITIME_TASTING_STUDIO

NORTH BEACH'S FIRST PARKLET
UPPER GRANT IN FOUR ACTS

by Hartmut Gerdes

North Beach's lively 2020/21 parklet scene during the COVID-pandemic makes me recall the neighborhood's—and likely San Francisco's—very first parklet. It was located on Upper Grant Avenue, in front of the now shuttered Savoy Tivoli. The espresso at the Caffé Trieste, my daily stopover to and from work, was 25 cents. It was 1968—one year after my arrival during San Francisco's "Summer of Love."

Upper Grant's ever-changing flair and flash and its plethora of creative and courageous entrepreneurs inspired this young urban designer. Having walked many alluring—and commercially successful—pedestrian zones throughout Europe, I wondered: "Why is this enchanting and beautiful street basically a parking lot, with only Band-aid size sidewalks left for people?" I would soon find out.

ACT I: 1968. A few espressos and design sketches later, I began to query Upper Grant storekeepers and residents. Merchants liked their daytime parking meters and residents their nightly parking spots. At my request, revered planning and open space advocate, Telegraph Hill dweller Dorothy Erskine, penned a letter to the National Endowment for the Arts. But merchant association leaders Peter and Virginia Macchiarini were certain that the City's "riff-raff" would hog any block closed to traffic. Planning Director Alan Jacobs insisted that only a street re-design concept supported by the entire neighborhood would engender city planners' interest. I threw in the towel.

Upper Grant before 2020 parklet construction. © David Lipkin

ACT II: 1971. After returning from a two-year hiatus in Munich, whose almost entire downtown is a dramatic, bustling pedestrian zone, I noticed that a few young radical urbanists had accomplished a feat they hoped would brighten Upper Grant and inspire neighbors to action. They had persuaded legendary Savoy Tivoli owner Freddie Kuh, the Macchiarinis, and the city's parking authority to allow them to put down— experimentally, for a few summer months—a bunch of boards, spanning the length of three or four parking spaces. They placed boxed trees and loaned benches on the parklet and at a few street corners. (They have remained friends and are avid Zoomers today.) The popular bohemian hangout and watering hole had gained a stylish addition: Upper Grant's and North Beach's first parklet. Until now.

Empty parklets on Upper Grant after second lockdown. © Hartmut Gerdes

ACT III: 2020. To everyone's surprise and delight, the pandemic spawned countless and popular parklets (aka "shared spaces") throughout North Beach, transforming Upper Grant into a series of ad-hoc urban rooms, demonstrating that social life and parking could be accommodated in new and pleasant ways and giving priority to people over cars. Through reduced and mainly diagonal parking, by strategically placing mid-block "terraces" for outdoor activities and displays, using low curb cuts, distinct paving patterns, and street furniture, each colorful block's unique businesses and characteristics could be highlighted—pleasing residents, merchants, and Upper Grant visitors and customers alike.

ACT IV: 2021/22. A perfect time to re-imagine and re-design Upper Grant…CARPE DIEM.

VIRTUAL BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS
OCTOBER – DECEMBER 2020

by Mary Lipian, Recording Secretary
mary.lipian@thd.org

October 2020

Annual Meeting: THD's Annual Meeting was held on Tuesday, October 13, 2020 via Zoom, with guest speaker the noted journalist Carl Nolte. The Board slate for 2020-2021 was presented to the THD General Membership and approved. (See officers and directors on page 11.)

THD Award: Howard Wong received the Telegraph Hill Dwellers' 2020 "Outstanding Contribution to the Neighborhood" Award for his longtime, effective community activism: as a former member of THD's Board of Directors and current co-chair of the Transportation Committee, President of the District 3 Democratic Club, founding member of Save MUNI and Next Village SF, and community representative on the Central Waterfront Advisory Group and the Pioneer Park Project Team.

November 2020

Buon Gusto: The nomination of the Buon Gusto Sausage Factory for listing on the National Register of Historic Places was unanimously approved by the State Historical Resources Commission at its November meeting. Architectural historian Katherine Petrin prepared the nomination on behalf of THD pursuant to a grant from San Francisco Heritage.

State Density Bonus Projects: THD has voiced its concerns with two projects in North Beach that propose to use the State Density Bonus Law, which would allow the developers to significantly exceed our 40-foot height limit and exempt the developments from other zoning laws. These include a proposed project at 425 Broadway and another at 659 Union/1656 Powell (the Verdi Building and adjacent garage).

Discretionary Review Requests: THD has asked the Planning Commission to review two projects, at 460 Vallejo and 140-142 Jasper Place, which, if approved, would destroy long-time tenant-occupied rental properties by developers who propose to expand them into luxury housing.

North Beach First Fridays: THD was a co-sponsor of the November 6, 2020 First Friday to promote art, retail, and restaurants in the neighborhood, before the more extreme lockdown that followed.

December 2020:

Winter break; no meeting.

THE FINE ART OF
PICTURE FRAMING

WWW.CADRE-SF.COM
(415)296-0400
301 UNION ST. AT MONTGOMERY

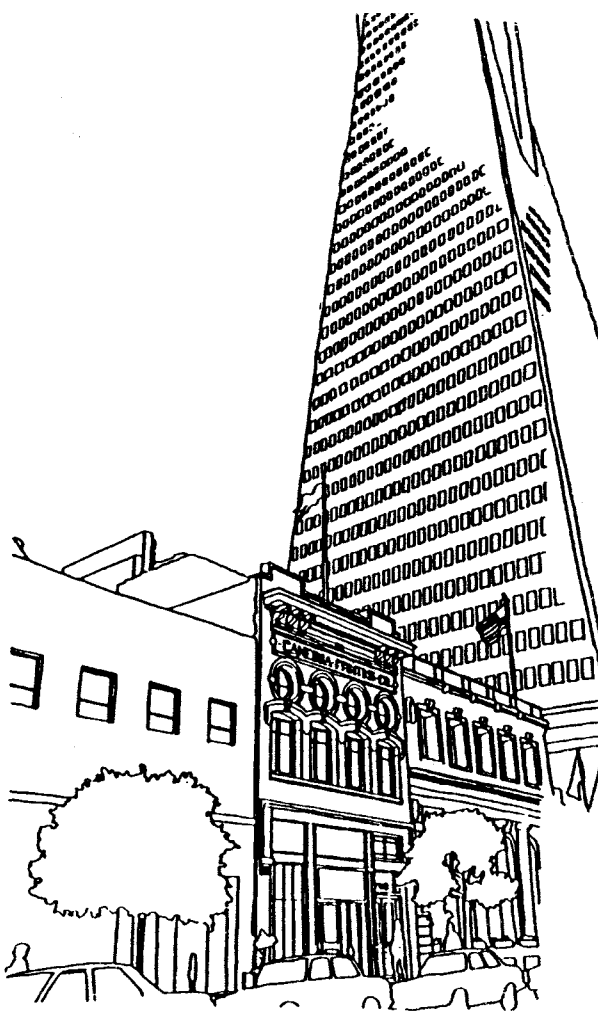
MENTION "**THE SEMAPHORE**"
AND GET **10% OFF** ON
ALL CUSTOM FRAMING!

TREASURER'S REPORT

by Nick Ferris
nick.ferris@thd.org

As any reader of *The Semaphore* will know, the Telegraph Hill Dwellers' fiscal year begins in April and ends in March of the following year. All officers, directors, committee chairpersons, and writers are unpaid volunteers, reimbursed only for expenses incurred on behalf of THD. We depend on our membership dues (just $35/year!) to continue advocating for the neighborhood and provide this quarterly newspaper. Our largest expenses are the production of *The Semaphore*, followed by member events.

At this time of writing, with fewer than four months left in our fiscal year, we remain in strong financial health with a positive net income. We've been able to make contributions to a variety of worthy causes, and we expect to break-even this year, despite the chaos and challenges of COVID-19. For any readers interested in supporting THD and this publication, please reach out as we'd love for you to become a member and get involved.



ADVERTISEMENT

DENNIS HEARNE
photographer
www.dennishearne.com
tel 415 989 5152
email dennishearne@mac.com
779 Vallejo Street
San Francisco, California 94133
PORTRAITURE, ARCHITECTURE, AND DOCUMENTATIONS

Breakfast & Lunch
7:30 to 2:30—this is 7 days a week.
PAT'S CAFE
Support Small Business
2330 Taylor Street
San Francisco, CA 94133
415-776-8735
AWESOME BREAKFASTS & LUNCHES

ESPRESSO CAPPUCCINO VINO PANINI
CAFFÈ GRECO
423 Columbus Ave.
San Francisco, CA 94133
415-397-6261
Hanna & Sandy Suleiman

CITY LIGHTS BOOKSELLERS & PUBLISHERS
A LITERARY MEETING PLACE SINCE 1953
OPEN DAILY 10am–midnight
261 COLUMBUS AVE SAN FRANCISCO CA 94133 | 415 362 8193
www.citylights.com

Advertise in The Semaphore

Reach Our Telegraph Hill Dwellers Community
Join Our Roster of Neighborhood Serving Businesses
For Ad Sizes and Rates Contact:
Andy Katz at *andy.katz@thd.org*

INDEPENDENT & FAMILY OWNED SINCE 2012
BEACON COFFEE & PANTRY
805 COLUMBUS AVE · (415) 814-2551
LOCATED BETWEEN LOMBARD & GREENWICH

FRIENDS OF WASHINGTON SQUARE
Meet on the 2nd Tuesday every month, with work parties in the Square every quarter. See website for times, dates, locations.
www.friendsofwashingtonsquare.com

THD COMMITTEES NEED YOU

Get involved in our neighborhood and make a difference! Join a THD committee and help keep the Hill a special place to live.

STANDING COMMITTEES

Art & Culture: Romalyn Schmaltz romalyn.schmaltz@thd.org
Budget: Nick Ferris nick.ferris@thd.org
Membership: Andy Katz THDmembership@gmail.com
Oral History Project: Judy Irving judy.irving@thd.org
Transportation: Howard Wong and Joey Babbitt
howard.wong@thd.org and joey.babbitt@thd.org
Parks & Trees: Don Raichle don.raichle@thd.org
Planning & Zoning: Mary Lipian and Nancy Shanahan
mary.lipian@thd.org and nancy.shanahan@thd.org
Semaphore: Cap Caplan (Editor) cap.caplan@thd.org
David Lipkin (Photo Editor) david.lipkin@thd.org
Social & Program: Rachel Rodriguez and Patrice Ignacio Moll
rachel.rodriguez@thd.org and patrice.ignacio.moll@thd.org
Waterfront: Open
Communications: Al Fontes, Katie Hopkins, Leah Lovelace, Sarah Kliban
al.fontes@thd.org

PLANNING & ZONING COMMITTEE MEETS last Thursdays of each month. Call for time and location.
986-7070 or 563-3494 or 391-5652.

LIAISONS WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Central Police District Community Advisory Board: Daryl Babbitt
Coalition for San Francisco Neighborhoods: Al Fontes
Friends of Washington Square Liaison: Don Raichle
Northeast Waterfront Advisory Group Member: Open

TELEGRAPH HILL DWELLERS

Voice Mail: (415) 843-1011. Web Site: www.thd.org
P.O. Box 330159 • San Francisco, CA 94133

THD BOARD OFFICERS 2019-2020

President: Stan Hayes – stan.hayes@thd.org
Vice-President: Nancy Shanahan – nancy.shanahan@thd.org
Recording Secretary: Mary Lipian – mary.lipian@thd.org
Corresponding Secretary: Katie Hopkins – katie.hopkins@thd.org
Treasurer: Nick Ferris – nick.ferris@thd.org
Financial Secretary: Andy Katz — andy.katz@thd.org
Historian: Al Fontes — al.fontes@thd.org
Immediate Past President: Judy Irving — judy.irving@thd.org
Editor of *The Semaphore:* Cap Caplan — cap.caplan@thd.org

DIRECTORS

Term: 2019-2021
Romalyn Schmaltz
Patrice Ignacio Moll
Rachel Rodriguez
Sarah Kliban

Term: 2020-2022
Leah Lovelace
Don Raichle
Julia Martin Murphy
Termeh Yeghiazarian

WELCOMING NEW MEMBERS!

There's no better way to be connected to your neighborhood and be a voice of the hill than by joining Telegraph Hill Dwellers, today.

Join at *THD.org*. If you'd prefer to have a brochure and sign-up form mailed to you, please send an email to *membership@thd.org*. Already a member? Give one as a gift!

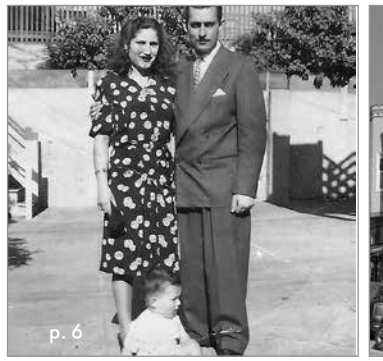
Membership includes:

- A one-year subscription to news & events via email and a quarterly paper, *The Semaphore.*
- Opportunities to be active in your community. Your passion likely aligns to one of many committees.
- Social and Art & Culture events throughout the year – attend and contribute!

Annual Dues:
Individuals..... $35
Households..... $50
Seniors (65 and older)..... $25
Senior Households..... $40

Join now or give the gift of membership at *THD.org* or email *membership@thd.org*.

Telegraph Hill Dwellers
P. O. Box 330159
San Francisco, CA 94133



THE SEMAPHORE

#232 Winter 2021

FEATURES and COLUMNS

Kids Corner by Sarah Kliban 1

President's Corner by Stan Hayes 2

From the Editor by Cap Caplan 2

Art Saves Lives: Thomasina De Maio's 250 Art Classes Of 2020
by Romalyn Schmaltz 3

Supervisor's Report: 2020 Year in Review by Aaron Peskin 4

Houseplant Hero by Katherine Petrin 5

My Godfather Was Joe Conforte — Nevada's King Of Prostitution
by Charles Versaggi 6

Transportation Report: Muni Budget Crisis And Potential Layoffs
by Joey Babbitt and Howard Wong 8

Parks & Trees Report: Parks And Open Space Progress In 2020
by Don Raichle 8

Membership Engagement Report by Nick Ferris 9

North Beach's First Parklet—Upper Grant In Four Acts
by Hartmut Gerdes 10

Virtual Board Meeting Highlights October – December 2020
by Mary Lipian 10

THD BUSINESS

Treasurer's Report by Nick Ferris 11

Board of Directors and Committees 11

Become a Member 11

SEMAPHORE STAFF

Editor: Cap Caplan — semaphore@thd.org

Photo Editor: David Lipkin — david.lipkin@thd.org

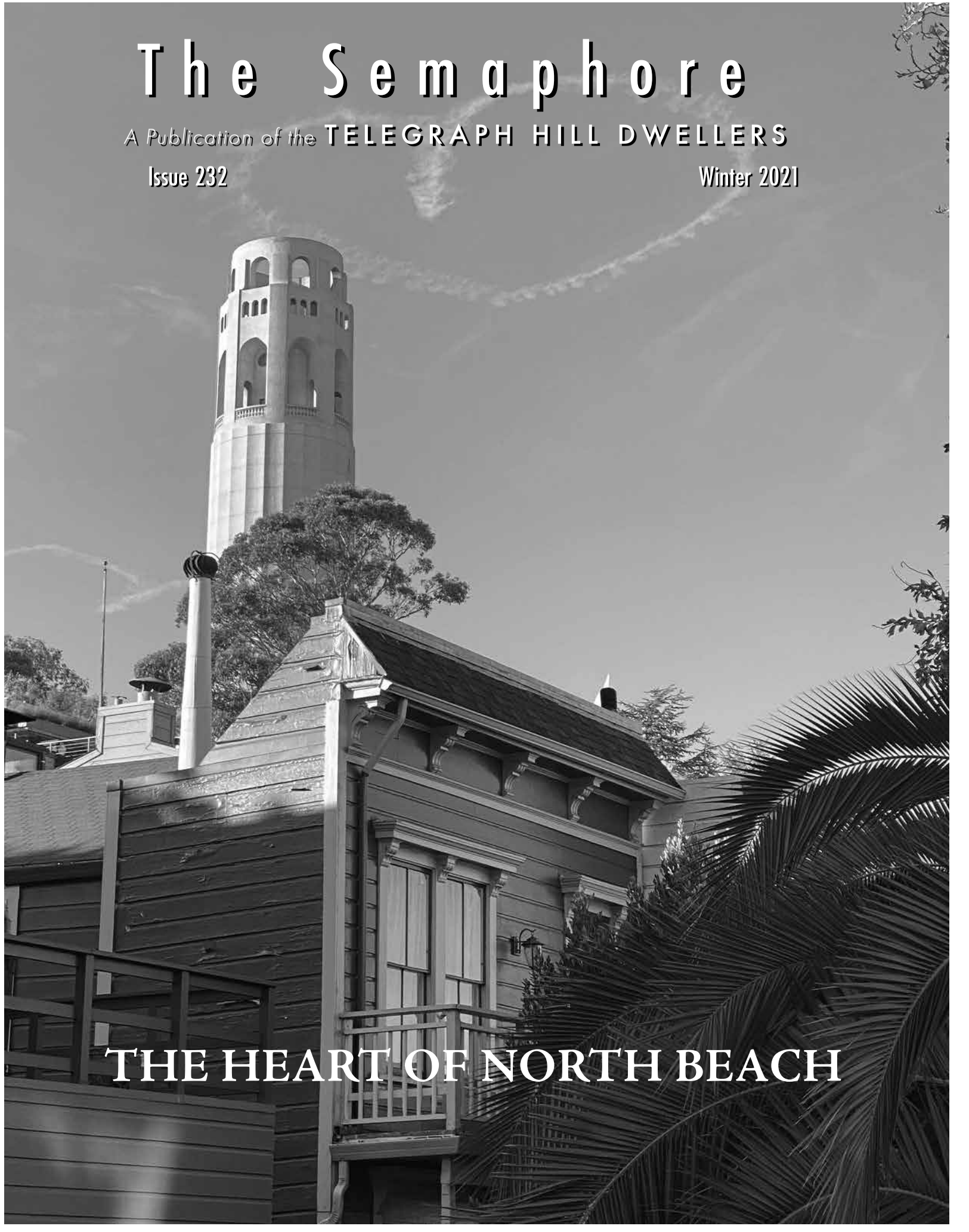
Design and Layout Artist: Chris Carlsson — carlsson.chris@gmail.com

Ad Sales: Andy Katz — andy.katz@thd.org

Business Manager: Al Fontes — al.fontes@thd.org

The Semaphore is a publication of the Telegraph Hill Dwellers for its members. Articles, except for the summary of Board of Directors' Motions, do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Association or its officers, but are the opinions of the writers of the individually copyrighted articles. The Association can take no responsibility for their content. No part of this membership publication may be reprinted or disseminated without permission in writing. © 2020. Cover photo credit: The Heart of North Beach © Stan Hayes

The Semaphore

A Publication of the TELEGRAPH HILL DWELLERS

Issue 232 Winter 2021